

Amendments to the Claims:

Please cancel claims 12 and 13 without prejudice. Please amend claims 1, 4, 10, and 33. Please add new claims 34 and 35. This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A biologically pure culture of a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant VRI 003 (accession no. NM02/31074) having comprising the following characteristics:
 - (a) it is a Gram positive, facultative rod,
 - (b) it ferments ribose, galactose, glucose, fructose, mannose, maltose, lactose, melibiose, sucrose, trehalose, raffinose, L-arabinose and mannitol,
 - ~~(e)~~ ~~it survives at pH 1.5 for up to 4 hours with a loss in growth of no more than log 3,~~
 - ~~(d)~~ (c) it propagates in the presence of 0.5% bile salts at 3 °C resulting in an increase in optical density of 0.5 to 0.8, and
 - ~~(e)~~ ~~it is stable when stored in gelatin capsules at 25 °C, whereby a loss of viability of no greater than 25% per six month storage occurs, and~~
 - ~~(f)~~ (d) it adheres to Peyer's Patches at greater than log 5 cfu per mg tissue.
- 2-3. (Canceled)
4. (Currently amended) A composition comprising: (i) a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claim 1 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier; or (ii) an organic component of a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claim 1 and a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier, wherein the component is a product of disruption of a whole cell.
5. (Original) A composition according to claim 4, further comprising a prebiotic, a non-digestible dietary component, dietary fibre or a pharmaceutically active compound.
6. (Original) A composition according to claim 5, wherein the prebiotic is inulin, a resistant starch, an oligosaccharide, a gum or a beta-glucan.

7. (Previously presented) A composition according to claim 5, wherein said prebiotic is unmodified high amylose starch.
8. (Previously presented) A composition according to claim 4, wherein said composition comprises live cells of the *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant.
9. (Previously presented) A composition according to claim 4, wherein said composition comprises dead cells of the *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant.
10. (Currently amended) A composition according to claim 4, in the form of a tablet, capsule, powder, paste, gel, or liquid formulation, ~~dietary supplement or food product~~.
11. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a tablet.
14. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a liquid formulation.
15. (Original) A composition according to claim 10, wherein said composition is in the form of a dietary supplement.
- 16-32. (Canceled)
33. (Currently amended) A composition according to claim 4, wherein the product is obtained by sonication or homogenization.
34. (New) A food product comprising a *Lactobacillus fermentum* variant according to claim 1.
35. (New) A food product according to claim 34, wherein said food product is a dairy or dairy-based food product.